



## PREVENTION OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE BIG SKY

### DRIVING WITH ALCOHOL AND NO SEAT BELT EQUALS DISASTER

Despite the overwhelming evidence that seat belt use and driving sober reduces motor vehicle crash-related fatalities, there are many persons in Montana who do not regularly buckle up when riding or driving in a motor vehicle, and who drive while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. The result, too frequently, is disaster for those persons and their loved ones. The average overall seat belt use rate for Montana is 79%, however seat belt use is much lower for occupants involved in fatal and alcohol-related crashes. Young adults, especially young men, American Indians, and persons who drink and drive are at increased risk for sustaining life-threatening injuries or death from being an unrestrained occupant in a motor vehicle crash.

#### MONTANA CRASH FACTS

Injuries are the leading cause of death for Montanans aged 1 to 34,<sup>1</sup> and motor vehicle crashes are the reason for the majority of injury-related deaths.

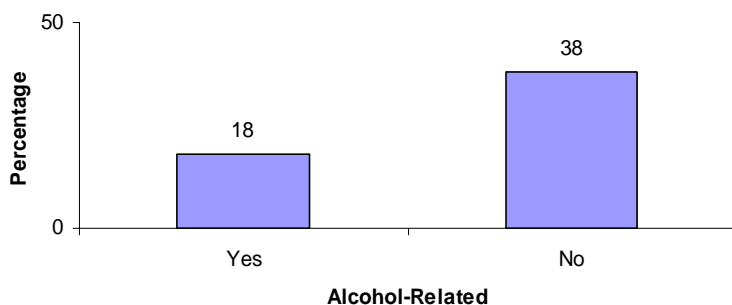
##### *In 2006*

- Of the 219 motor vehicle crash-related fatalities, only 29% of occupants were restrained<sup>2</sup>
- Nearly three quarters of the drivers in motor vehicle crash fatalities were men (72%)<sup>3</sup>
- The two age groups with the highest motor vehicle crash-related injury rates are 15 to 19 and 20 to 24<sup>4</sup> (26 and 18 injuries per 1000 population, respectively)

#### NO SEAT BELT AND ALCOHOL USE: A DEADLY COMBINATION

- 19% of all injury crashes, and 49% of all motor vehicle fatalities were alcohol/drug related in 2005<sup>5</sup>
- 18% of all fatal crashes and 26% of all alcohol-related crashes involved American Indians<sup>6</sup>
- Seat belt non-use magnifies the danger in alcohol-related crashes<sup>7</sup> (Figure 1)

**Figure 1: Seat belt use in alcohol and non-alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes, 2006**

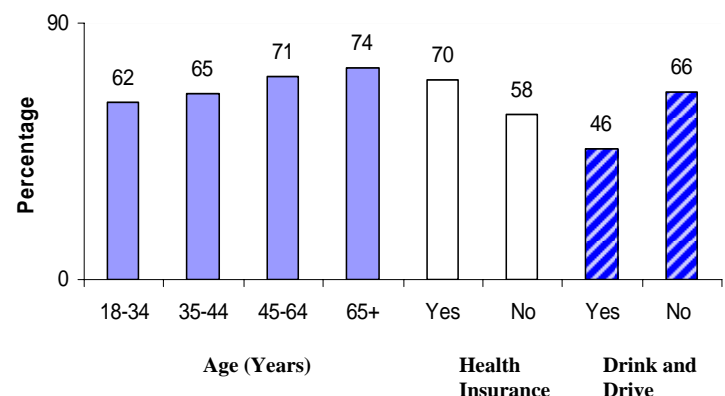


#### WHO IS (AND ISN'T) BUCKLING UP?

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is a random digit dial telephone survey of a sample of adult Montanans. The BRFSS survey includes questions assessing common modifiable risk factors and specific disease conditions.

In 2006, survey respondents were asked, "How often do you use seat belts when you drive or ride in a car?" and given the following response choices: Always, Nearly Always, Sometimes, Seldom or Never. Over two-thirds (68%) of adult Montanans reported that they always wore a seat belt, while fewer reported nearly always (20%), sometimes (7%), or seldom/never (5%). Women were more likely to report always wearing a seat belt when driving or riding in a car than were men (75% and 61%). American Indians were less likely to report always wearing a seat belt compared to whites (55% and 69%). Seat belt use was more frequent among persons with an annual household income greater than \$50,000 (71%) compared to respondents whose annual income was \$25,000 - \$49,999 (63%), \$15,000 - \$24,999 (67%), and less than \$15,000 (63%). Seat belt use also varied geographically. Respondents living in the Eastern (54%), North Central (64%) and South Central (66%) regions of the state reported less frequent use of seat belts compared to respondents living in the Northwest (73%) and Southwest (71%) regions. Younger Montanans, those without health insurance, and those who reported binge drinking in the past month (5 or more drinks on one occasion) were less likely to report always wearing a seat belt compared to respondents without these characteristics<sup>8</sup> (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Adult Montanans who report always using a seat belt, 2006**



## Prevention Steps

Seat belt use (always) and driving sober (always) are effective strategies for saving lives, reducing injuries and reducing healthcare costs. Young adults, especially young men, American Indians, and persons who drive while intoxicated are at increased risk for sustaining life-

threatening injuries or death during motor vehicle crashes because of being unrestrained.

Effective public health measures, such as implementing a primary seat belt law, would reduce mortality and morbidity from motor vehicle crashes.

### **Recommendation: Can many needless motor vehicle occupant deaths and injuries be prevented in Montana? Yes.**

- Always wear your seat belt and make sure others in your vehicle are properly restrained.
- Always drive sober.
- Health care professionals should counsel patients to wear a seat belt (always) while riding or driving in a motor vehicle and to drive sober (always).
- Implementation and enforcement of effective public health measures, including a primary seat belt law and a child safety seat law, would reduce deaths and injuries from motor vehicle crashes.

For more information about injury prevention in Montana, contact Bobbi Perkins, Injury Prevention Coordinator at (406) 444-4126 or email at [bperkins@mt.gov](mailto:bperkins@mt.gov).

#### References:

- 1 MT DPHHS, Montana 2006 Vital Statistics
- 2-7 Montana Department of Transportation, Traffic Safety Problem Identification Report FY 2008; pg. 49, 22, 25-26, 31-32, 27, 50, respectively.
- 8 Montana BRFSS; <http://dphhs.mt.gov:8084/brfss/html/brfss-index.jsp>

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1400 Broadway  
Helena, MT 59620-2951

Joan Miles, MS, JD, Director, DPHHS  
Steven Helgerson, MD, MPH, State Med. Officer  
Jane Smilie, MPH, Administrator, PHSD